

# Rajiv Gandhi's Bipolar World

Seven months after coming to office, India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi began his first foreign tour last week. His itinerary called for a two-stage trip to the Soviet Union, Western Europe and the Middle East with a four-day visit to the United States. In Moscow he was given a 1 billion-ruble line of credit. His welcome should be equally warm in Washington, where officials are encouraged by his pragmatic outlook. He remains under threat of assassination from associates of the militant Sikhs who murdered his mother. Before leaving India, Gandhi gave a wide-ranging interview to NEWSWEEK Editor Maynard Parker. Excerpts:

**PARKER:** The United States and India have always had a love-hate relationship. Why the misconceptions on both sides?

**GANDHI:** Well, we can tell you our side. At the moment our major problem with the U.S. is Pakistan's nuclear program. We believe that Pakistan is close to making a nuclear weapon. And we also feel that the U.S. is not doing all it could do to stop them. For example, the U.S. has exempted Pakistan from the [Symington] amendment: the only country which has been exempted. Recently a Pakistani national was caught by the U.S. Customs trying to smuggle out some triggering devices for nuclear weapons. This action was not tough enough. We feel that the U.S. perspective of the region is different from ours. The introduction of nuclear weapons in our area will completely change the whole region.

**Q.** How close do you think Pakistan is to building a bomb right now?

**A.** We feel they're very close.

**Q.** Are there any conditions under which you might consider a pre-emptive Indian strike against Pakistan's nuclear facilities, such as the Israelis did with Iraq?

**A.** We have not considered it. And we do try not to behave like the Israelis.

**Q.** When you talk to President Reagan, are you going to bring up the flow of U.S. arms to Pakistan?

**A.** Yes. It is something which is upsetting the balance in our region. But that's a balance we can meet by conventional means. But nuclear weapons in the region change the ball game completely. What we don't like about the \$3.2 billion U.S. weapons-

supply program is that it is much too large for Pakistan's true requirements. Ostensibly it is to be used in the war against Soviet and Afghan troops. But much of the equipment is such that it cannot be used in the mountainous areas surrounding Afghanistan. So it will be positioned against India.

**Q.** Some U.S. officials say the sales of conventional weapons to Pakistan discourage the Pakistanis from developing an atomic bomb.

**A.** But they have both.

**Q.** Do you think the American and other covert aid to the Afghan rebels is going to help get the Soviet troops out of Afghanistan?



With Gorbachev (right) at the Kremlin: Thirty years of friendship

**A.** No. I can't see the Soviets leaving Afghanistan with the kind of aid being given to the mujahedin. The Afghan rebels are not going to win. The Soviets are there at the invitation of the [Karmal] regime. And as long as Karmal feels insecure, he is not going to change his mind.

**Q.** Is there any way to get the Soviets out?

**A.** We've always been against both foreign intervention in another country and interference which covers what both the superpowers are doing. [Getting the Soviets out] depends on the mutual trust between the two superpowers, and the latest indications are not that good.

**Q.** India's relationship with the United States has improved since you came to power. Is your visit to Moscow connected in any way to a Soviet concern that India is tilting more toward the United States?

**A.** No. I don't think it is at all. In the U.S.

you have always felt that we have tilted toward the Soviet Union. We ourselves don't feel that. On many issues we do side with the Soviet Union, but so do 100-odd other countries. On many issues we disagree with them. And we would like to keep that option open. That is why we are nonaligned. The Soviet Union has been a very old friend of India's for over 30 years. They have helped us in our development; they helped us militarily with equipment when we needed it.

**Q.** A few weeks ago U.S. Under Secretary of Defense Fred Ikle visited New Delhi. What sort of military relationship is possible between India and the United States?

**A.** We haven't looked at that deeply enough yet. We haven't had time to. But earlier, we wanted to buy a particular weapon, a mountain gun, from the U.S. and there was a lot of hedging. So we didn't buy it. It was a bad experience. We wouldn't like anything like that to happen again.

**Q.** Two tragic deaths in your family catapulted you to leadership. Has your inexperience been a handicap—or an advantage?

**A.** I think on the whole it's been more of an advantage. It's been a disadvantage in the sense that I didn't know exactly how the wheels of government work. And it took me a little time to get the hang of that. But there was a positive side. You want to move much faster and you spot procedures which could be expedited.

**Q.** How do you feel about the FBI foiling the plot by Sikhs in the United States who wanted to assassinate you?

**A.** We are very, very thankful to the FBI... but I believe they could give us more information... so we could do the follow-up on our end.

**Q.** What effect did the Bhopal tragedy have on India's policy toward Western multinationals?

**A.** It has not affected our policy yet. But we are watching what will come out of it. We do feel that Union Carbide was responsible. We've got a fair amount of evidence. We've shown negligence at various stages from the design stage onwards. ... We think the amount of compensation they're offering is highly unfair.

**Q.** Your election has unleashed a great deal of enthusiasm. How long do you think your honeymoon will last?

**A.** We've now got a lot of young voters, almost 75 percent below 35 years of age, and they've not come through the freedom struggle. They've been able to see what's happening in the rest of the world and to want it. So we have to deliver. There's no alternative.